

1936

(Santa Cruz Island Trip 17 Mar - 28 Mar 1936)

FIELD NOTES - EGMONT RETT

Mar. 3 Tues. cont'd

From here went over to the Campbell Ranch (later Devereux School). The ponds here are also brimming full. Saw numerous Pintails, Ruddy's and 3 fine Mallard Drakes. The Allens Hummers were very abundant here but we saw little other bird life. One Marsh Wren was seen in a small patch of Tules.

Mar. 17 Tues.

To Sta. Cruz Island. Trip is for the purpose of obtaining a series of all the endemic forms of birds and mammals as possible. The crossing was uneventful. Saw nothing of interest with the exception of one No. Phalarope, Lobipes lobatus, took it to be a male and it was about 1 mile offshore from Orizaba. Put in close to the island near Fry's Harbor and ran along shore to "Prisoners" where we landed. The caretaker here let us have a horse and little sulky to haul our gear ashore. Saw several cormorants around the wharf, they were all Farallon and Brandt's and only one Brandt's was in full breeding plumage, the white hairy plumes on the cheeks could be seen plainly. After lunch we did a little collecting around the mouth of the creek at Prisoners. Here the creek forms a small pond with growths of Tules and Willows. The pond produced a fine male Sora, Porzana carolina, probably a record for the island. The trees were literally alive with Audubon Warblers, W. Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Gambel's and Nuttall's Sparrows, a few Green-backed Goldfinches, many San Clemente House Finches. Collected a Red-breasted Nuthatch in the Pines on the beach. Dusky Warblers were singing and feeding in the Willows about the pond. Took a short hike of about a mile inland and collected a Santa Cruz Jay, Aphelocoma insularis. Saw 4 or 5 and shot at several. The one I got was a breeding female. A bit further on, on a steep hillside thickly covered with Prickly Pear, Opuntia sbsp. we saw several Towhees, Pipilo maculatus sbsp, and collected a fine Santa

Cruz Sparrow, Aimophila r. obscura. We had to cut our way thru the cactus to reach it. On reaching camp I collected another Jay. Made these specimens up. Tomorrow we go to the Puerta Zuela Camp which is located in about the center of the Island. I talked to "Justie" Caire who will come for us and haul our duffle up to the cabin where we will make our headquarters.

Mar. 18 Wed.

Up early and get ready to move to Puerta Zuela where there is a cabin in which we will camp. While waiting for "Justie" Caire to come for our duffle I made up a Myotis that flew into the building where we worked last night. I am told Bats are quite common on the island but don't know which species.

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Mar. 18 cont'd

Saw several Barn Swallows or W. Martins flying toward the mainland in a N. Westerly course. I couldn't quite tell which they were but from the size judged they were Martins. Justie arrived at about 10 AM. We loaded our gear on the old White truck, vintage of 1913, and proceeded to the Main Ranch. While we waited for lunch we collected a couple of Jays and 2 Wrens, T. b. nesophilus. I also secured a male Red-naped Sapsucker, Sphyrapicus, v. nuchalis, just before we left Prisoners. He was feeding in the Willow Trees. The Ravens were plentiful here at the Pig pens. I shot twice at one but missed. They are very difficult to approach elsewhere on the island. After many delays we finally got started for Puerto Zuela. The road is rough and steep, the truck stopped going up and Bill had to hop out and put a block under the rear wheels. We got going again after 30 minutes and arrived at the cabin at 5 PM. It has been uninhabited for a long time. After working quite hard and making it livable we got supper and turned in. It is nice here, the creek runs by the cabin and supplies us with good water. The hills rise steadily to the NW to the main divide of the island. They are rolling and grass covered broken with small arroyos with thickets of cherry and oak. The ground rises abruptly from behind the cabin to the SW and these hills are clothed thickly with oak and Cherry and Ceanothus. Everywhere the ground is uprooted by wild pigs. We have not seen any as yet.

Mar. 19 Thurs.

Up at 6:10. After breakfast looked at the few rodent traps we hurriedly set last night after dark but found only one contained a Peromyscus and it was ruined. We then made up the specimens of yesterday and started out for a short survey of the grass covered slopes NW of us. I was anxious to get some Island Horned Larks but saw none, took 3 Jays. They are common everywhere and easy to get. The Shrikes are very hard to approach. Took a Golden-crowned Sparrow, Zonotrichia coronata. It was with Gambel's Sparrows which are common everywhere and make the taking of Santa Cruz Sparrows, Aimophila r. obscura, rather difficult. Both species are found together and are very seldom in the open. If the light is wrong it is difficult to tell them apart. We got 2 nice male Aimophila. We tramped over the hills a couple hours on the way home we flushed 3 Shrikes by careful stalking, I managed to get one. Shortly after taking the shrike and when we were nearly home I came upon 2 Wrens and secured both. They proved to be a pair that were mating. Got in about 1 PM, had lunch and spent the balance of the afternoon making up our specimens, 11 in all. Shortly before dark made four sets for Foxes and Skunks. Have seen a little

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Mar. 19 Thurs. cont'd

Fox sign but not plentiful. Also set 8 rodent traps around the cabin. These island *Peromyscus* are expert bait stealers. Thirty minutes after making the sets I examined them. All had the bait eaten and 2 specimens were caught. I reset the traps very carefully and put the bait on tight but on examination a few minutes ago I found it gone and only 1 mouse. I reset them again. Now am turning in very tired after a hard days work.

The weather is a bit unsettled although it was clear during the night and nice this morning; it clouded up about 3 PM and is now quite cloudy.

Mar. 20 Friday

Up before daylight, have an early breakfast as we want to hike to the top of the divide NW of the cabin. We were in search of Horned Larks but did not see one. When we got up above the tree line which here on these bleak hills is about 1000 ft. we saw little life of any kind. It reminded me of above timberline in the high Rockies and Sierras. We saw a Raven's nest site, the birds were flying about, evidently just mating. I collected a male and there was no enlargement of the testes. We hunted hard but still saw nor heard any Horned Larks. The Santa Cruz Sparrow, *Aimophila r. obscura*, is quite common on the cactus covered slopes. They seem to prefer the semi-arid slopes to the brushy arroyos and bottomlands. We collected several specimens today. One pair acted as though they had a nest. The resident birds are in various stages of sexual development, some are breeding and others are not paired off as yet. We arrived at the cabin at about 12:30, prepared dinner and the rest of the afternoon and evening was devoted to making up skins, 15 birds and mammals prepared today. A westerly wind began to blow at sunrise and is increasing in violence by the hour. To bed at 10:30 very tired.

March 21, Saturday

Wind blew quite hard all night and is still increasing. Up early, it is quite cold this morning. One of our traps held a Spotted Skunk, *S. g. amphialis*. He had the surrounding territory well scented. After breakfast skinned and made him up. His stomach contained nothing but insects, beetles and bugs of various sorts all unknown to me. It also contained one of his claws that he had evidently bitten off in trying to free his foot from the trap. The wind is nearly gale velocity and is making things very uncomfortable.

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## FIELD NOTES - EGMONT RETT

March 21, Saturday cont'd

I am slightly sick from upset stomach and am being troubled with a severe headache.

On covering the trap line flushed an owl but not able to tell the species, chased him half a mile up the canyon which is thickly covered with Manzanita Cherry and Oak. Was unable to get a shot or even a good look at him, he was very elusive. On returning to the cabin my head seemed to be splitting so I lay down nearly all afternoon. Bill took a hike and bagged a Shrike. Birds are scarce, they are all trying to get out of the wind like ourselves. It is blowing so hard now that it is difficult to walk in it. I suffered pretty bad during the night. The wind seemed to be tearing the cabin apart. It shook with every gust.

March 22 Sunday

Awoke this morning feeling better. The wind is still at gale proportions. Covered the trap line but only got one Island White-footed Mouse. It is practically impossible to do any collecting in this weather. About noon we decided to hike down the canyon toward the main ranch which is about 500 feet lower. Going down the old road the wind pushed us along so that we leaned backwards and let it shove us down the grade. On reaching the bottom of the hill it was a little more quiet. We saw very few birds. Heard a Dusky Warbler singing. I collected 1 Island Shrike, Lanius l. anthonyi, and one Island Wren, T. b. nesophilus. Bill got a nice Towhee, Pipilo m. clementae. We saw it was of little use to continue as even down here the wind was of sufficient force to keep the birds from moving. Had a hard pull coming up the hill against the wind but finally made it.

Had lunch, made up the specimens then about 4 PM set a few steel traps in the canyon  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile east of us. Also made some sets for mice around the cabin. This evening at 7 the wind is abating and we hope tomorrow will permit us to get out early.

March 23 Mon.

Up at 6 AM, the wind has ceased and now it is quite cold. Covered the traps before breakfast but they yield nothing. One farthest up the canyon was sprung. Started out collecting after breakfast. The morning sun was warm but a slight breeze sprung up from the West again. Worked the hills and canyons. Collected 2 W. Lark Sparrows, Chondestes, 5 Carpodacus m. clementis. They are difficult to get because they always alight on the heaviest growths of cacti. If we shoot them it is impossible to retrieve them. These birds show no evidence of breeding yet altho they are now paired off. The Aimophila are all paired now and are preparing to nest. Saw 3 Shrikes but did not get any. Saw a Barn



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FIELD NOTES - EGMONT RETT

March 23 Mon. cont'd

Swallow feeding over the meadows. It was evidently a male as it had a beautifully forked tail and its plumage glistened in the sun. Ravens are common everywhere but hard to get a shot at them. In all the hunting we have done here we have not seen any Wild Hogs. They are evidently not as common as formerly. We see some sign where they come to water but that is all. Took nine specimens today. The Lark Sparrows being the only new ones not heretofore taken. Worked the grassy slopes and meadowland hoping to find Horned Larks but no success.

On returning to the cabin the weather was nice so we decided to work outside. After a little time the wind freshened and we had to work in the dark cabin. It was getting colder and the wind blowing up again. By this PM it was very miserable working in this cold cabin. Justie Caire rode in about 3 PM and I made arrangements to get the horse and sulky so we can move out of here tomorrow. We will hike down about 8 miles and bring back the cart to haul our gear out. This place is impossible to work in. Now to bed as we must be away early.

Mar. 24 Tuesday

Up at 5 AM and start packing. It is no use to stay here any longer. It is impossible to work without being very miserable. I covered the trap line back of the cabin and we got one Spilogale and one Urocyon, Island Fox. After breakfast we started the long trek to Prisoners to get the little cart or sulky. We covered the other traps and got another Fox. We hung it in a tree and proceeded. The sky began to look stormy so we hurried along. By the time we reached the Ranch it was starting to rain. We had no coats and were carrying the 2 cameras and collecting guns. Shortly after leaving the ranch it started to rain hard. By the time we reached Prisoners Harbor we were thoroly soaked. Got the old mare hitched up and back we started. We rode on the cart only a short way as we were chilled through being soaking wet and inactive. We led the horse all the way up to our camp at Puerta Zuela. How we ever got all of our gear on that sulky was quite a mystery. We had it loaded beyond capacity and contemplated trouble, especially going down the steep grade. We were very careful coming down but when nearly at the bottom on a very steep place the old mare slipped and down she went in a heap. She lay groaning and we tried to get her up but she couldnt stir. We unpacked the cart (lucky just then it wasnt raining) unhitched her with much difficulty backed the cart up the hill and finally after working like fury got her on her feet.

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FIELD NOTES - EGMONT RETT

Mar. 24 Tuesday cont'd

We hitched her up again and got the cart packed and just got down the hill when the storm hit us again. This time it was hail driven by a wind that was very frigid to say the least. When we arrived at the ranch the sun broke thru and it certainly felt good. We tarried here long enough to eat a few crackers and some cheese, after a short rest went on our weary way again. Altho' we did take some of the heavy things off the cart. These were bro't to us later, they were things we wouldn't need while at Prisoners. The road follows the creek bottom and is very rough. We were afraid the little old cart would collapse and we certainly didn't want any more trouble. We had had more than plenty already and we both were so tired it would have been impossible to take that load off the sulky. We had already walked 17 miles in soaking wet clothes. I was leading, practically pulling the horse along and my shoulders were aching terribly; finally I climbed aboard and rode for nearly a mile. This rested me considerably and then Bill rode in to Prisoners. We got in just at 5 PM. Unloaded the cart and got everything under cover when it began to pour again. We did get a break in that from the time we left the ranch it didn't rain. We got into some dry clothes and Juan's fire felt great as we were getting supper. I don't believe there were ever two men more fagged out than we were. To bed immediately after supper.

Mar. 25 Wed.

Slept well until about 4 this morning when the old Windmill here woke me. It has a sort of a wail as it turns. Went back to sleep until 7 when I got up and I was very stiff in the joints. Yesterdays work was quite a strain. The wind blew hard all night and was still continuing this morning. The sea is very rough. The sun was bright and warm by nine o'clock and I got all my wet clothes and everything else that was wet out and dried it. Finished skinning the 2 Foxes and Skunk and prepared them. Collected 8 birds this evening, 3 Fox Sparrows I think they are sinuosa but am not sure, 2 Island Jays, 1 Island Shrike, 1 Calif. Woodpecker. This bird is probably a record for the Island. Got another Sora in the marsh. W. Mourning Doves are very numerous all over the Island. Set some rodent traps before supper. I just looked at them and 3 held Peromyscus. Of all the birds encountered so far the Shrikes are the most difficult to get. The resident Song Sparrow has not been seen so far, but I tho't I heard one singing this evening. We are still hoping to come across some Horned Larks. This species and Melospiza m. clementae are the only 2 endemic birds that we haven't taken to date. We have been here one week. The Foxes we took each carried  $3\frac{1}{4}$  developed embryos. This seems to indicate that 3 is a litter.

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Mch. 26 Thurs.

Up at 6 AM. After a good breakfast got to our specimens. Made up our 8 birds and 7 Peromyscus by noon. Made 4 sets for Fox and Skunk and then hiked to the top of the hills to the east of Prisoners. Here we came on a flock of about 200 Otocoris a. insularis, Island Horned Larks. They were shy and difficult to see on the ground. The grass on the hills is about 10 inches tall and when the birds came down in it we couldn't see them. The way we obtained our specimens was to flush them and get them on the wing which is not very easy. We got a nice series of 6. I believe these birds have just come over from the mainland. Although we never visited this particular locality we were in typical Horned Lark country but never saw any until this afternoon. We collected 6 and they seemed to be mostly males. We got another nice Shrike and one Towhee. I shot another but lost it in the cactus. This is one of the few instances where we took a chance on getting one out of a clump of cacti. We see many birds that we need but never take them when perched on the cacti even on the edge. If they fall into the prickly mass it is impossible to retrieve the specimen. Eagles are scarce. I shot at an immature Bald Eagle. It hit him but he was too far to be injured. I thought maybe the shot might strike and break a wing. The Sora I took yesterday was a female. They undoubtedly were going to nest in this little marsh. The Melospiza is the only endemic bird that we haven't found. If this bird isn't around here I don't know where else to look for it. We have covered the ground thoroughly and it is all typical Song Sparrow habitat. Tule association with heavy growths of nettles and Willow. Yet we haven't seen or even heard these birds. I thought I heard one last evening but am sure now that I was mistaken. We noticed the absence of Audubon's Warblers today. They must have migrated. A few days ago they were very common here. The Dusky Warblers are now in full song. We hear them all day. The Nuttall's and Gambel's Sparrows are still here. Also saw another Calif. Woodpecker today. Flushed several Savannah Sparrows out of the grass on the hills. I collected one but I am puzzled as to which race it belongs. The day has been wonderful and clear and warm. We could look across to the mainland and see the roads cut in the hills behind Santa Barbara. The Channel was not at all rough. We will probably have a nice spell of good weather now. To bed a little tired.

March 27 Friday

Slept well last night. Up at 6. The morning broke clear and warm. Had breakfast and then covered our trap line. All traps untouched. Left them set as we may get something tonight. The Foxes and Skunks are not so very plentiful. We have had sets for both species out every night and only got 4 specimens. We

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## FIELD NOTES - EGMONT RETT

March 27 Friday cont'd

came back to camp and collected 5 House Finches, Carpodacus m. clementis. We now have a fairly good representation of all the endemic races here with the exception of the Song Sparrow. Worked until about 3:30 preparing specimens. We now have a total of 82 birds and mammals. Noticed quite a few Audubon Warblers again today. The Horned Larks should be nesting in about one week judging from the development of the gonads. 5 or 6 birds we took were males. It just occurred to me that on consulting my notes for Mar. 3, I collected a male Horned Lark from a small flock. I remarked that later in the morning we saw Horned Larks paired off and the males singing. I am beginning to wonder if the birds I saw in the flock were O.a. insularis altho I called the one I took actia. The gonads were enlarged but I cant understand why, if these birds were actia they were still in flocks. My conclusion now is that the mating birds we saw were actia and the ones still banded were wintering insularis. I am quite certain that there were no Horned Larks on the island until a day or two ago. We are all packed now ready to leave when our boat comes in the morning. Altho the first part of our stay was not very pleasant the past few days have been very productive and we enjoyed them. We are a bit reluctant to leave.

Mar. 28 Saturday

We have been here just 10 days. Today our boat is due. Our skipper said he would be here about 9 AM. We were just finishing breakfast when Pete the ranch foreman came with old truck and the duffle that we left at the ranch last Tues. He was in a hurry so we left off breakfast, loaded the balance of our material on the truck and hauled it out on the wharf. On walking back to our quarters I found a female House Finch that I got yesterday. I coned her and put her in my hunting coat. After finishing our interrupted breakfast we went down and began scanning the horizon for our boat. A sea was beginning to make up and I was getting anxious to get under way. Crossing the channel in a little cackle shell is not too pleasant in rough weather. We still had 3 traps out, but they held nothing. While out on the wharf watching for the boat I noticed several Loons feeding around the small kelp beds present just off shore. They were too far away to permit me to distinguish the species. I shot twice at a Grebe with the 22 rifle. Hit him with the second shot but it drifted away before the boat arrived and we didnt get it. The Loons seemed to be in breeding plumage. Sea birds were scarce.

About 8:30 I discerned a small white object on the horizon. After 15 minutes I saw it was a boat. It turned out to be ours and she pulled up to the wharf at exactly 9 AM. John Churchill, owner and skipper, is a very reliable man.



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Mar. 28 Saturday cont'd

We got her loaded and as the skipper reported it was blowing up outside. We bid old Juan Leon, our host, adios and got under way. The crossing was uneventful, saw only a few W. Gulls. About mid-channel we ran out of the wind, arrived at the breakwater at 1:45, just 4 hours crossing. Had a successful and productive trip. With all the time lost during the bad weather and bad working conditions we brought back 67 birds and 7 mammals; total 84. Time spent on the Island was a little over 10 full days.

April 26 Sunday

To Dillingham cabin above Painted Cave with the Rea family. Birds observed, Cliff Swallows numerous probably nesting in the vicinity. About 20 Wh.-throated Swifts flying about feeding near the cabin. Saw some near La Cumbre "lookout" also. Turkey Vulture: saw several gliding over the canyon and the rising air currents would lift them gracefully upwards. One we watched rose nearly perpendicular for perhaps 100 ft. Saw four in the air at one time. All the vultures were observed on the wing. A Redtail was also seen here. Heard several Wren-tits and saw one. A pair of W. Gnat-catchers are building a nest in front of the cabin. It is just being finished. I was attracted by the birds singing. They kept coming closer and presently I saw one of the birds working on the nest. I couldn't see good enough to determine which of the two it was but I think it was the female as all the while it was working the singing continued. I don't think the male would be working on the nest and singing at the same time. The nest was the usual compact type situated in a crotch made by the main trunk and the first large branch. The nest was about 10 feet from the ground and nicely decorated with lichen. Saw a few pairs of House Finches, they were probably nesting close by. Tho't I heard a Bell's Sparrow singing.

Apr. 30 Thurs.

Awoke at 4:50 this AM. I lay in bed watching for the Band-tailed Pigeons on their morning flight. These birds roost at the Botanic Garden and fly over my house in a SW direction early in the morning and back to the roost in the evening.